

OWA OUTDOORS

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

Aug. 7, 2007

1. Duck Hunting Forecasters Predict Excellent Fall Flight – by Lowell Washburn
[electronic photos available]
2. Wapsipinicon Bird Conservation Area to be Dedicated Aug. 14
3. Grant Money Available for Facilities Catering to Larger Boats
4. Mississippi River Boat Ramp Closed During Dredging Project
5. Extend the Summer with Volunteer Opportunities
6. Natural Resource Commission to Meet Wednesday, Thursday in Sioux City

[Electronic photos available]

DUCK HUNTING FORECASTERS PREDICT EXCELLENT FALL FLIGHT

By Lowell Washburn
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The beginning of this year's waterfowl season is just weeks away and optimism is running high as hunters prepare for fall. According to a joint summary released by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service, this year's survey of duck breeding populations increased 14 percent over 2006, and was 24 percent above the long term [1955 to 2006] average. Couple those duck counts with extremely desirable spring habitat conditions across the eastern Dakotas and prairie Canada --- where overall May pond counts were 44 percent above the long term average and ponds in southern Canada were the fourth highest ever recorded --- and you produce a fall duck migration that will easily exceed 100 million birds.

“Overall, I'd have to say that we're looking at one of the best production efforts from prairie Canada that we've had in twenty years,” says DNR State Waterfowl Biologist, Guy Zenner. “The eastern Dakotas were extremely wet and populations of breeding mallards were 138 percent above the long term average in that region. Biologists from southern Saskatchewan tell me they're observing the best duck production in at least three decades. As the migration progresses this fall, those areas can be very important in supplying ducks to Iowa hunters.”

This year's fall duck flight will contain a large percentage of young birds --- mallards, teal, redheads, canvasback, gadwalls, and others --- which should bode very well for Iowa hunters, says Zenner. As young ducks migrate south, they tend to explore new habitats and, because they're less experienced, are much more susceptible to hunters' decoys.

But although guaranteed waves of webfoots will be departing the breeding grounds come autumn, knowing exactly where to intercept those flights can become the hunter's greatest challenge. Because Iowa is located smack in the middle of the north/south flyway, hunter success here hinges largely on developing fall weather patterns and the condition of local wetlands. Future weather patterns are impossible to predict, but a preseason visit to your local duck pond can pay big dividends when opening day finally arrives.

"We know that a large flight of ducks will be coming south this fall, but the big unknown at this point is whether or not we'll have substantial amounts of suitable habitat to attract and hold those birds as they cross the state," says Zenner.

"Iowa's prairie pothole region [located in the north central and northwest portions of the state] has just come through a very dry period," said Zenner. "They've recently received some rainfall, but wetlands are low and it will take a lot more precipitation to return marshes to crest levels."

Many of the state's river systems are also experiencing low water levels. This could present problems when it comes time for managers to divert [river] water needed to fill popular public hunting areas such as Otter Creek and Big Marsh.

By contrast, water levels along the upper Mississippi River are more than adequate. Many of the river's backwater areas are currently well vegetated and these food rich habitats should appear very desirable to southbound waterfowl. Zenner regards the Mississippi River as "the biggest bright spot" in this year's habitat puzzle.

Another potential bright spot in this year's habitat mosaic is that wetlands in northern Minnesota are currently supporting an excellent crop of wild rice. If those rice beds attract and hold large numbers of birds, it will help Iowa hunters immensely.

"As northern lakes freeze tight, waterfowl are forced to move southward. It never hurts to have a million or more ducks staged directly north of where you hunt," said Zenner.

###

**WAPSIPINICON BIRD CONSERVATION AREA TO BE
DEDICATED AUG. 14**

A dedication of the upper Wapsipinicon River as Iowa's 11th official Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will take place at 1:30 p.m., Aug. 14, at the west access parking lot for Sweet Marsh Wildlife Management Area, two miles north of Tripoli, on the east side of Hwy. 93. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting the event. The short ceremony will include brief presentations and unveiling of a special Bird Conservation Area sign, followed by a short tour of representative bird habitats.

"Designating this portion of the upper Wapsi as a Bird Conservation Area provides important recognition of this area's value to a host of resident and migratory bird species," said Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity program biologist. "The many habitat types within the river corridor provide essential food and shelter for uncommon or declining species like sandhill cranes, woodcock or sedge wrens, as well as more common birds such as Wilson's snipe and eastern kingbirds."

Creating Bird Conservation Areas in Iowa is a priority for DNR's wildlife diversity program and is part of a larger international effort to help birds with the greatest conservation need, said Doug Harr, DNR's state program coordinator for wildlife diversity. "Our BCA program emphasizes habitat conservation at a large landscape level to establish stable or growing bird populations. Each BCA includes a combination of well-managed public and private lands, and the Wapsi River makes a perfect candidate for a Bird Conservation Area," Harr said. "The program is non-regulatory, and private landowners participate only if they wish to."

The Wapsi BCA is the result of state and county agencies, as well as private organizations and citizens cooperating to emphasize the importance of bird habitat. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is another important partner in helping landowners provide good cover for watershed protection and improved bird habitat.

"This overall partnership serves as an excellent example of how to better conserve all natural resources in this unique landscape," said Doug Chafa, wildlife biologist for the DNR's Sweet Marsh Wildlife Management Unit, which encompasses the new BCA. Because bird watching is an increasingly popular outdoor activity, it is anticipated that this new BCA may attract the attention of birders around the region. DNR officials remind birders that while public wildlife lands are open to bird watching, birders must always ask permission from landowners before venturing onto private property.

The public is welcome to attend this event and help celebrate the designation of this important Bird Conservation Area on the Iowa landscape.

For more information, contact Ehresman at (515) 432-2823, Harr at (515) 281-4815, or Chafa at (563) 425-4257.

###

GRANT MONEY AVAILABLE FOR FACILITIES CATERING TO LARGER BOATS

The federal Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) program makes funding available to marina operators with a need to develop transient boat access facilities with efforts to strengthen community ties to the water and to promote the awareness of transient boating opportunities. The program consists of two funding levels. Through the Tier 1 program level the Iowa Department of Natural Resource (DNR) awards \$100,000 to the applicant submitting the best project proposal. The Tier 2 grant level is nation wide competitive program in which grant awards may exceed \$1 million dollars.

The BIG program is limited to marina operators who have need for transient boats facilities. A transient boat is defined as a boat that is 26-feet or longer and does not moor at any one place for more than 10 continuous days. Facilities for this type of boat are often insufficient and sometimes are totally lacking. Transient boaters are often unable to enjoy many of the recreational, cultural, historic and, scenic and natural resources opportunities associated with waters that they boat on. The grant is available to public marinas that have a need to create or improve transient boat facilities.

Marinas along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers are the most likely recipients for the program money, said Martin Konrad, BIG Coordinator for the DNR.

“These rivers lack the marina or commercial tie-up facilities needed for transient boaters to recreate for extended stretches,” Konrad said. “Basic facilities such as tie-ups, fueling docks, utilities and restrooms are mostly non-existent.”

Marina owners and operators wanting more information on the Boating Infrastructure Grant program should contact Martin Konrad at 515/281-6976. Interested parties are required to submit grant proposals for consideration, to the DNR by October 1, 2007.

###

MISSISSIPPI RIVER BOAT RAMP CLOSED DURING DREDGING PROJECT

HARPERS FERRY, Iowa - The parking area and boat ramp at Heytman's Landing will be temporarily closed while a contractor conducts a dredging project in the area.

Dredging is needed as silt has made the boat channel and harbor area nearly unusable during low water. The work is expected to last into the fall.

Heytman's Landing is a small state owned landing managed by the Allamakee County

Conservation Board. It is located in Lower Pool 9 of the Mississippi River near River Mile 654.

###

EXTEND THE SUMMER WITH VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

DES MOINES — As summer comes to a close, the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program, in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources offers volunteers many opportunities to stay connected to their favorite natural resource area even after the summer officially ends.

- **River Cleanup Opportunities:** Volunteers are needed on Aug. 11 for DNR sponsored river clean-ups on the Boone River and on the Maquoketa River. For more information on these cleanup events and additional river events needing volunteer assistance during August, visit the DNR's river cleanup events calendar www.iowater.net/StreamCleanupEvents.htm
- **Woodworking and Construction Opportunity:** Officials at Lake Manawa State Park are seeking volunteers to assist with various park construction projects including repairing and painting picnic tables and constructing new kiosks and signs. This opportunity starts immediately and ends upon project completion. For more information contact Don DeLong at 712-366-0220.
- **Prairie Management Opportunity:** Officials at the Prairie Seed Production Plot, near Adel, are seeking volunteers to help with various prairie seed production needs including removing invasive species, harvesting seeds and planting prairie plugs. This opportunity is available now and ends in mid-October. For more information contact Bill Johnson at 515-543-8319.
- **Butterfly Prairie Management Opportunity:** Officials at Bellevue State Park are seeking volunteers to help with planting and caring with individual plots in their butterfly prairie garden. Twenty-five plots are available for immediate adoption and will require care until Oct. 15. For more information, contact Ron Jones or Shannon Petersen at 563-872-4019.
- **Park Enhancement Opportunity:** Officials at Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area are seeking volunteers to assist with various park enhancement projects including trimming bushes, repairing picnic tables and painting park buildings. This opportunity starts immediately and ends upon project completion. For more information contact Joan Flecksing at 319-361-1224.
- **Watercraft Inspection Opportunity:** Officials with the DNR are seeking volunteers to assist with controlling aquatic invasive species through boater education activities. This opportunity starts immediately and ends Sept. 30. For more information, contact Kim Bogenschutz at 515-432-2823 ext. 103 or Jason Euchner 515-432-2823 ext. 118.

Please visit the Keepers of the Land website at www.keepersoftheland.org for information on these and more volunteer opportunities. For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us.

###

NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO MEET WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY IN SIOUX CITY

SIOUX CITY – The Natural Resource Commission and staff with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will meet 1 p.m. Wednesday, at the Clarion Hotel in Sioux City, for a tour of the area. Commissioners will meet at 7 p.m., Wednesday in the Clarion Hotel, 12th floor, Clarion East Room for a work session to discuss Honey Creek Resort State Park.

The Commission will hold its regular monthly meeting at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, Aug. 9, at the Clarion Hotel, 12th floor, Clarion East Room. The meetings and tour is open to the public.

Members of the commission are Kim Francisco, Elizabeth Garst, Carol Kramer, Lennis Moore, Gregory Drees, Janelle Rettig and William Bird. The Director of the DNR is Richard Leopold.

For more information, contact Karyn Stone at 515-281-8650

###